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THE TREATMENT OF AILING GODS.¹

A LARGE proportion of the numerous myths which I have collected among the Navaho Indians of New Mexico and Arizona belong to a class which I call rite-myths. They pretend to account for the origin of ceremonies or for their introduction among the Navahoes. Some of them are of great length. I have one in my possession which contains nearly thirty thousand words, but others are quite short. The length of the story that you receive depends as much on the memory or knowledge of your informant as on the original amplitude of the tale. A shaman telling the story of the rite with which he is most familiar will have much more to say than when he is recounting the myth of a rite with which he is not familiar. In most cases some of the elements of the ceremony are given, but are never all told. In the short myth I am about to relate, although many observances—absurd to the Caucasian understanding—are described, they are probably not one tenth of those to be witnessed during the actual performance of the ceremony. I say this from my experience in the study of other rites and myths.

I shall relate to you now, in the words of a shaman, a brief myth of how a couple of the greatest divinities of the Navaho pantheon were taken ill and how they were successfully treated by a minor divinity; and when I have done you will thank the unnamed shaman for making the tale so short.

It is long since the Navahoes went to war; but in former days when we fought our enemies we often suffered from war diseases. Our young men know nothing of this. One who killed an enemy by striking him in the chest would get disease in the chest; one who killed his enemy by striking on the head would get disease of the head, and one who killed by wounding in the abdomen would get disease of that part.

Thus it came to pass that, in the ancient days, when the war-gods *Nayénězgani* and *To'badzistsíni* had killed many of the Alien Gods, they got war diseases in many parts of their bodies. They suffered much and became so weak that they could not walk. Their friends tried all the remedies they could think of, but for a long time no cure was found.

At length some one said: "There is one dwelling at *Tse'sindíai* (Black Standing Rock) named *Dóntso* (an insect) who knows of one who can cure war disease." So the people lay in wait for *Dóntso* and caught him. "Who is it that can cure the war disease?" they

¹ Read at the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the American Folk-Lore Society, Baltimore, Md., December 28, 1900.

asked. "I dare not tell," said *Dóntso*; "it is one whom I fear, who does not like to have his power known." But the people persisted and persuaded and threatened till at last *Dóntso* said: "It is *Hastsézini* (Black God), the owner of all fire. But never let him know it was I who revealed the secret, for I fear his vengeance."

On hearing this, the people got a sacred buckskin, filled it with jewelled baskets, precious stones, shells, feathers, and all the treasures the gods most prize, and sent the bundle by a messenger to *Hastsézini*. When the messenger entered the house of the fire-god he found the latter lying on the ground with his back to the fire — a favorite attitude of his. The messenger presented his bundle and delivered his message; but the fire-god only said, "Begone! Go home, and take your bundle with you."

The messenger returned to his people and told the result of his errand. They filled another sacred buckskin with precious things and sent him back with two bundles as a present to Black God; but the latter never rose from the ground or took his back from the fire. He dismissed the messenger again with angry words. Once more the messenger was sent back with three bundles and again with four bundles of goods tied up in sacred buckskins; but the god only bade him begone, as he had done before. When he returned to his people he found them singing.

Now *Dóntso* appeared before them and asked them what they had offered the fire-god. They told him, and added: "We have offered him great pay for his medicine, but he refuses to aid us, and sends our messenger away with angry words." "He is not like other gods," said *Dóntso*; "he is surly and exclusive. Few of the holy ones ever visit him, and he rarely visits any one. He cares nothing for your sacred buckskins, your baskets of turquoise and white shell, your abalone and rock crystal. All he wants is a smoke, but his cigarette must be made in a very particular way." And then he told them how to make the cigarette sacred to *Hastsézini* [a recital which I shall spare my hearers]. But he made the people all pledge secrecy. He lived with the fire-god, and thus he came to know how the cigarette should be made and how it should be given to the god.

Three messengers now went to *Hastsézini*. Two remained outside, and one went in to deliver the cigarette, and thus he gave it: He carried it from the right foot of the god, up along his body, over his forehead, down his left side, and laid it on his left instep. Shading his eyes with his hand, the god gazed at the cigarette on his instep. He picked it up, examined it on all sides, and said angrily: "Who taught you to make this cigarette? No one knows how to make it but *Hasániazi* (Little Old Man) and *Dóntso*. One of these must have taught you." The messenger replied: "I made

it myself according to my own thoughts. No one taught me. *Dóntso* dwells above you and watches you day and night; he never leaves you." *Hastséžini* examined the cigarette again, inhaled its odor four times, and said: "*Láa!* It is well! This is my cigarette. Stay you and show me the way I must travel. Let the other messengers go home in advance. I shall get there on the morning of the third day." But they begged him to start that night. He bade the messengers who went in advance to kill a deer with two prongs on each horn, and to boil it all for a feast. When they returned to their home, they told what *Hastséžini* had said to them, and the people got all things ready as he had directed.

Next morning the Black God left his home, went about half way to *Nayéněžgani's* house, and camped for the night. Many people came to his camp and held a dance there. There were birds among them, for in those days birds were people. And because of this occurrence now, in our day, when *Hastséžini* camps at night on his way to the medicine-lodge, the people go to his camp and hold a dance.

On the morning after this dance, all left for the house of sickness and got there at sunset. Before they arrived they began to shout and to whoop. The Navahoes in these days shout and whoop, and they call this shouting *altásítse*. A party from *Nayéněžgani's* house, when they heard the shouting, went out to meet the returning party, and they had a mock battle, in which *Hastséžini's* party seemed victorious. Such a mock battle we hold to-day in the rites.

When *Hastséžini* and his party arrived at the lodge there was a feast of the venison. Then the ailing gods said they wished to go out of the lodge. Previously, for many days they had to be carried out; but now they were only helped to rise, and they walked out unaided. The people who came with *Hastséžini* now went out and began to sing. The Black God was there; he had not yet entered the lodge. But when the people came out he joined them, and when they returned to the lodge he entered with them.

They now burned materials and made two kinds of mixed charcoal. The first was made of pine bark and willow. The second was composed of five ingredients, namely: *tsıld'ílgisi* (a composite plant, *Gutierrezia euthamiae*), *tlo'nastázi* (a grama-grass, *Bouteloua hirsuta*), *tsé'aze*, or rock-medicine (undetermined), a feather dropped from a live crow, and a feather dropped from a live buzzard. They made four bracelets for the patients, each out of three small yucca leaves plaited together. Then they prepared for each seven sacred strings called *wolthád*, such as are now used by the shamans, and are so tied to a part that with a single pull they come loose. They pounded together cedar leaves and a plant called *thágiitsin* and made

of these a cold infusion. All present drank of this infusion, and the patients washed their bodies with a portion of it. They applied the wolthád to different parts of the patients' bodies, proceeding from below upwards, viz: feet, knees, hands, and head. While they were tying these, the Black God entered and song was begun. When the singing was half done, the patients and all present drank again of the cold infusion, and the patients washed their bodies with the residue. Assistants next touched each of the ailing gods with black paint made of the second charcoal, on the soles, the palms, on each side of the chest, on each side of the back, over the shoulder-blade, and painted the throat. They greased the bodies of the gods with a big lump of sacred fat, and over this coating of grease they rubbed the first charcoal until the bodies looked as black as that of *Hast-sézini* himself. But they painted the faces with grease and red ochre, and they spotted each cheek in three places with specular iron ore. They put on each a garment called *kátaha* *hastsé* [worn diagonally like a sash]; they tied on the yucca bracelets, and tied a downy eagle-feather, plucked from a live eagle, to each head. The two who painted the patients got for a fee four buckskins each. They placed gopher manure in the moccasins of the ailing gods, and then put the moccasins on. They put strings of beads around their necks. They gave to each a bag of medicine, out of the mouth of which stuck the bill of a crow. They began to sing, and sent the *tanlési* (patients) forth from the lodge.

The patients went to a place where lay the scalp of an enemy on which ashes had been sprinkled. Each picked the scalp four times with the crow's bill from his medicine-bag. Then they went to a distance from the lodge and "inhaled the sun." They did not then return to the medicine-lodge, but each went, as he was instructed, to his home, where a mixture of gles (white earth) and water was already prepared for him. Each dipped his hand into this, and marked on the shins, thighs, and other parts of his body the impress of his open hand in white. They partook of corn pollen, the first food they had eaten during the day, and they arose and walked around, happily restored. It was beautiful above them. It was beautiful below them. It was beautiful before them. It was beautiful behind them. It was beautiful all around them.

At sundown *Hast-sézini* left for his home, and the war-gods went back to the medicine-lodge. The people sang all night, and beat the basket-drum. As was done to the gods then, so would we do to-day, if one among us got the war-disease.

Washington Matthews.